



ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS
G R E G A B B O T T

May 5, 2005

Mr. Dick H. Gregg, Jr.
Gregg & Gregg, P.C.
16055 Space Center Boulevard, Suite 150
Houston, Texas 77062

OR2005-03900

Dear Mr. Gregg:

You ask whether certain information is subject to required public disclosure under the Public Information Act (the "Act"), chapter 552 of the Government Code. Your request was assigned ID# 223512.

The City of Arcola (the "city"), which you represent, received a request for all records pertaining to the hiring of the current city attorney, secretary, treasurer, and mayor and a former city administrator. You inform us that the city will release some of the requested information. You claim that the remaining information is excepted from disclosure under sections 552.101 and 552.117 of the Government Code. We have considered the exceptions you claim and have reviewed the information you submitted.

We first note that the submitted information includes the minutes of an open meeting of the city council. Section 551.022 of the Open Meetings Act, chapter 551 of the Government Code, expressly provides that the "minutes and tape recordings of an open meeting are public records and shall be available for public inspection and copying on request to the governmental body's chief administrative officer or the officer's designee." Gov't Code § 551.022. Information that is specifically made public by statute may not be withheld from the public under any of the exceptions to public disclosure under chapter 552 of the Government Code. *See, e.g.,* Open Records Decision Nos. 544 (1990), 378 (1983), 161 (1977), 146 (1976). The city must release the minutes of the city council meeting in accordance with section 551.022.

Section 552.101 excepts from public disclosure “information considered to be confidential by law, either constitutional, statutory, or by judicial decision.” Gov’t Code § 552.101. This exception encompasses the common-law right to privacy. Information must be withheld from the public under section 552.101 in conjunction with common-law privacy when the information is (1) highly intimate or embarrassing, such that its release would be highly objectionable to a person of ordinary sensibilities, *and* (2) of no legitimate public interest. *See Indus. Found. v. Tex. Indus. Accident Bd.*, 540 S.W.2d 668, 685 (Tex. 1976). Common-law privacy encompasses the types of information held to be intimate or embarrassing in *Industrial Foundation*. *See id.* at 683 (information relating to sexual assault, pregnancy, mental or physical abuse in workplace, illegitimate children, psychiatric treatment of mental disorders, attempted suicide, and injuries to sexual organs). This office has since concluded that other types of information also are private under section 552.101. *See* Open Records Decision Nos. 659 at 4-5 (1999) (summarizing information attorney general has held to be private), 470 at 4 (1987) (illness from severe emotional job-related stress), 455 at 9 (1987) (prescription drugs, illnesses, operations, and physical handicaps), 343 at 1-2 (1982) (references in emergency medical records to drug overdose, acute alcohol intoxication, obstetrical/gynecological illness, convulsions/seizures, or emotional/mental distress).

Common-law privacy also encompasses certain types of personal financial information. This office has determined that financial information that relates only to an individual ordinarily satisfies the first element of the common-law privacy test, but the public has a legitimate interest in the essential facts about a financial transaction between an individual and a governmental body. *See, e.g.*, Open Records Decision Nos. 600 at 9-12 (1992) (identifying public and private portions of certain state personnel records), 545 at 4 (1990) (attorney general has found kinds of financial information not excepted from public disclosure by common-law privacy to generally be those regarding receipt of governmental funds or debts owed to governmental entities), 523 at 4 (1989) (noting distinction under common-law privacy between confidential background financial information furnished to public body about individual and basic facts regarding particular financial transaction between individual and public body), 373 at 4 (1983) (determination of whether public’s interest in obtaining personal financial information is sufficient to justify its disclosure must be made on case-by-case basis).

In this instance, you seek to withhold information relating to the compensation of individuals who have been employed by the city or who have contracted to provide professional or administrative services to the city. You contend that such information is intimate or embarrassing and of no legitimate public interest. As this office has often noted, however, the public generally has a legitimate interest in information that relates to public employment and public employees. We have reviewed the rest of the submitted information and conclude that the city may not withhold any of the information under section 552.101 in conjunction with common-law privacy. *See* Gov’t Code § 552.022(a)(2) (providing for required public disclosure of name, sex, ethnicity, salary, title, and dates of employment of each employee and officer of governmental body); *id.* § 552.022(a)(3) (providing for release of information

in contract relating to receipt or expenditure of public or other funds by governmental body); Open Records Decision Nos. 562 at 10 (1990) (personnel file information does not involve most intimate aspects of human affairs, but in fact touches on matters of legitimate public concern), 542 at 5 (1990) (information in public employee's resume not protected by constitutional or common-law privacy under statutory predecessors to Gov't Code §§ 552.101 and 552.102), 470 at 4 (1987) (public employee's job performance does not generally constitute his or her private affairs), 455 at 9 (1987) (job applicants' salary information not private), 444 at 3 (1986) (public has obvious interest in information concerning qualifications and performance of governmental employees), 405 at 2 (1983) (manner in which public employee performed his or her job cannot be said to be of minimal public interest).

Section 552.117(a)(1) excepts from public disclosure the home address and telephone number, social security number, and family member information of a current or former employee of a governmental body who requests that this information be kept confidential under section 552.024. The determination of whether a particular item of information is protected by section 552.117(a)(1) must be made as of the date of the governmental body's receipt of the request for the information. *See* Open Records Decision No. 530 at 5 (1989). Thus, the city may only withhold information under section 552.117(a)(1) on behalf of a current or former employee who requested confidentiality under section 552.024 prior to the date of the city's receipt of this request for information. The city may not withhold information under section 552.117(a)(1) on behalf of a current or former employee who did not timely elect under section 552.024 to keep the requested information confidential.

You inform us that the former city administrator timely elected confidentiality for his home address and telephone number under section 552.024. Based on your representation, we have marked information that the city must withhold under section 552.117(a)(1).

In summary: (1) the city must release the minutes of the city council meeting under section 551.022 of the Government Code; (2) the city must withhold the information that is excepted from disclosure under section 552.117(a)(1); and (3) the rest of the submitted information must also be released.

This letter ruling is limited to the particular records at issue in this request and limited to the facts as presented to us; therefore, this ruling must not be relied upon as a previous determination regarding any other records or any other circumstances.

This ruling triggers important deadlines regarding the rights and responsibilities of the governmental body and of the requestor. For example, governmental bodies are prohibited from asking the attorney general to reconsider this ruling. Gov't Code § 552.301(f). If the governmental body wants to challenge this ruling, the governmental body must appeal by filing suit in Travis County within 30 calendar days. *Id.* § 552.324(b). In order to get the full benefit of such an appeal, the governmental body must file suit within 10 calendar days.

Id. § 552.353(b)(3), (c). If the governmental body does not appeal this ruling and the governmental body does not comply with it, then both the requestor and the attorney general have the right to file suit against the governmental body to enforce this ruling. *Id.* § 552.321(a).

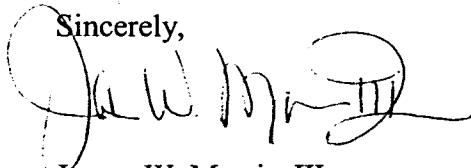
If this ruling requires the governmental body to release all or part of the requested information, the governmental body is responsible for taking the next step. Based on the statute, the attorney general expects that, upon receiving this ruling, the governmental body will either release the public records promptly pursuant to section 552.221(a) of the Government Code or file a lawsuit challenging this ruling pursuant to section 552.324 of the Government Code. If the governmental body fails to do one of these things, then the requestor should report that failure to the attorney general's Open Government Hotline, toll free, at (877) 673-6839. The requestor may also file a complaint with the district or county attorney. *Id.* § 552.3215(e).

If this ruling requires or permits the governmental body to withhold all or some of the requested information, the requestor can appeal that decision by suing the governmental body. *Id.* § 552.321(a); *Tex. Dep't of Pub. Safety v. Gilbreath*, 842 S.W.2d 408, 411 (Tex. App.—Austin 1992, no writ).

Please remember that under the Act the release of information triggers certain procedures for costs and charges to the requestor. If records are released in compliance with this ruling, be sure that all charges for the information are at or below the legal amounts. Questions or complaints about over-charging must be directed to Hadassah Schloss at the Texas Building and Procurement Commission at (512) 475-2497.

If the governmental body, the requestor, or any other person has questions or comments about this ruling, they may contact our office. We note that a third party may challenge this ruling by filing suit seeking to withhold information from a requestor. Gov't Code § 552.325. Although there is no statutory deadline for contacting us, the attorney general prefers to receive any comments within 10 calendar days of the date of this ruling.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'J W Morris III', written over a horizontal line.

James W. Morris, III
Assistant Attorney General
Open Records Division

JWM/sdk

Ref: ID# 223512

Enc: Submitted documents

c: Mr. Todd Christmas
323 Disney Street
Rosharon, Texas 77583
(w/o enclosures)